



# NEEDS ASSESSMENT:

## Taking the Pulse of the Public Recreation Client



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# **NEEDS ASSESSMENT: TAKING THE PULSE OF THE PUBLIC RECREATION CLIENT**

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## **PREFACE**

Meeting the challenge of today's leisure service market has prompted many park and recreation agencies to adopt private sector practices. Increasingly, successful managers are turning to marketing as a means of providing their clientele (the public) with more relevant services at fairer prices

with enhanced program awareness and efficient delivery.

This handbook focuses on needs assessment which is an important tool for soliciting input which will guide future product, pricing, promotion and distribution decisions. It suggests to the agency what citizens see as the agency's mission and what they would like to see the agency do. This handbook discusses all of the ways to conduct needs assessments, but devotes special attention to the survey method.

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## INTRODUCTION

### Why Do a Needs Assessment?

The function of any park and recreation agency is to provide the public with what it wants and needs. To determine exactly what these wants and needs are, an agency must undertake needs assessment. That is, the agency must gather information directly from the public and analyze that information. The result can direct the agency toward fulfilling expressed needs and guide efficient, effective and equitable service delivery.

A marketing approach focuses on the consumer. Since an agency's constituency consists of *all* citizens, a needs assessment must "take the pulse" of the entire community, being responsive and accountable to more than just the vocal and visible interest groups of current users.

All marketing tasks — setting objectives, identifying target markets, developing products, and pricing, promoting and distributing those products — assume that a needs assessment has been undertaken. For example:

- *Setting objectives.* What do its constituencies believe the agency should be doing?
- *Identifying target markets.* What do citizens need and want? What are the characteristics of those who share a particular need? How many are affected? What makes individuals decide whether to use existing services?
- *Product development.* How do potential target markets react to various service alternatives that could meet these needs?

- *Pricing.* What price should be charged?
- *Promotion.* How can availability be best communicated?
- *Distribution.* At what time and locations should service alternatives be offered?

Needs assessments are key tools in building the support constituency important to any public agency. Needs assessments can provide the support data necessary for justifying requests to a political body. Not only are the findings valuable, but doing a needs assessment demonstrates to the community and its decisionmakers that, vis-a-vis other departments, the agency did its homework. Citizens who have some impact on the services being offered to them will generally react more favorably to an agency and its programs.

"In Austin we interviewed one percent of the citizens in our needs assessment household interviews in the summer of 1980," a senior Austin park planning official said. "This doesn't sound like a very large sample, yet it seems everybody in the city knows somebody who has been interviewed. The very positive public relations effort, press support and public response which resulted simply from having done the needs assessment was a bonus benefit we did not anticipate from this effort."

### General Approaches to Needs Assessment

There are four general approaches which may be used in an assessment of community needs.



Three of these, citizen advisory committees, public meetings and workshops, and unstructured inputs and structured exploratory interviews are nonsurvey methods. Surveying is the fourth approach.

No method can independently produce an effective needs assessment. Each method has a specific role and makes a vital contribution.

### ***Citizen Advisory Committees***

Citizen advisory committees are viewed generally as formal (appointed or elected) bodies which link the views and opinions of segments of the community with agency decisionmakers. They may provide a connection with an agency's clientele and assist and support program planning and development. They may also conduct surveys and appraisals which serve as needs assessments, since they act as a liaison for screening community suggestions and criticisms.

In principle, advisory committees should reflect the interests found among an agency's publics and communicate these interests to agency officials.

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## ***...doing a needs assessment demonstrates to the community and its decisionmakers that...the agency did its homework.***

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Some have been criticized for over-representing an affluent, influential sector, members of which usually possess more flexible schedules, more successful career achievement patterns and stronger leadership voices in community affairs. Do not assume that an attempt by an advisory committee to rank needs incorporates the wishes of the *entire* community.

Still, the involvement of a citizen advisory committee can substantially enhance the quality and responsiveness of an agency's services. It may contribute useful suggestions which ensure all dimensions of an issue are addressed.

### ***Public Meetings and Workshops***

A *public meeting* is the most common method used to solicit input on citizen needs and preferences. It has two main advantages. First, it facilitates a two-way dialogue which enables needs to be explored, so that in-depth insights which help clarify and define issues may emerge. Second, personal contact transmits emotion more effectively than mail or other impersonal means of input. It sometimes helps managers to sense this emotional intensity.

*Workshops* are variations of the public meeting. Arrange participants into small discussion groups. They will focus upon identifying needs and developing program alternatives for meeting them. Workshops generate more enthusiasm among participants than public meetings because participants can do more than just sit and listen.

As with citizens' advisory committees, opinions expressed at public meetings or workshops are not representative of the public. Participants' input reflects the feelings of only the more active, vocal and involved segments of the population.

### ***Unstructured Inputs and Structured Exploratory Interviews***

*Unstructured inputs* come from two main sources. First, unsolicited suggestions may be volunteered by citizens, usually in face-to-face meetings with employees or in telephone conversations. Second, the public may be invited to provide written input to a particular issue, after information has been disseminated through the mass media.

*Exploratory interviews* with selected citizens represent a more structured approach to soliciting input on needs and preferences. Those interviewed should reflect as many relevant interest segments of the population as possible. The interview questions should be open-ended. These interviews are a "fishing expedition" to catch as many need dimensions as possible. To reduce costs, the telephone can be used as an alternative to personal interviews.

There is no simple rule for determining the number of respondents who should be interviewed. At a certain point, additional interviews fail to provide new insights, and answers fall into a familiar pattern. Frequently, this point is reached after 15 to 20 interviews.

An alternative to individual exploratory interviews is the *focus group discussion*. A divergent group of citizens is brought together and a moderator generates discussion by a few carefully selected "focusing questions." The participants' statements are carefully and accurately recorded and subsequently analyzed to identify all components of the issue. Such discussion should be as expansive as possible, so that the full range of participants' opinions are revealed.

### ***Surveys***

In its final form, the survey represents a synthesis of information which emerges from the other nonsurvey methods. It takes all of the resulting viewpoints and issues, and seeks to determine how they are distributed in the total population.

This handbook features the survey method of needs assessment because it is the most accurate way of identifying community needs, wants and

preferences. If a survey is done correctly, the information it yields represents the views of all citizens.

### ***The Approaches in Concert***

If the four methods of needs assessment were arranged in order of amount of citizen involvement, they would form a pyramid as in Figure 1. More people will be involved in decisionmaking through surveys than by the use of any of the other three approaches. The value of the nonsurvey methods cannot be underestimated; their use is essential before any survey can be undertaken. Together, their role is to solicit citizen input which will expand the agency's understanding of a problem. Agency staff cannot be expected to know all aspects of an issue, and citizens often have different perspectives of needs than agency personnel. Without direct citizen input, some initial dimensions of the needs assessment may be omitted from the survey, which means they will not be addressed in the analysis or in the final recommendations and program actions. Hence, the survey's results will be inherently biased.

As an example, assume that an agency wants to increase use of its underutilized services, but does not undertake public meetings, exploratory interviews or consult an advisory board. Agency staff may suspect the following reasons for lack of use based on their experience and the reported findings of others:

- facilities are too far away, or too difficult to access for some groups of potential users.

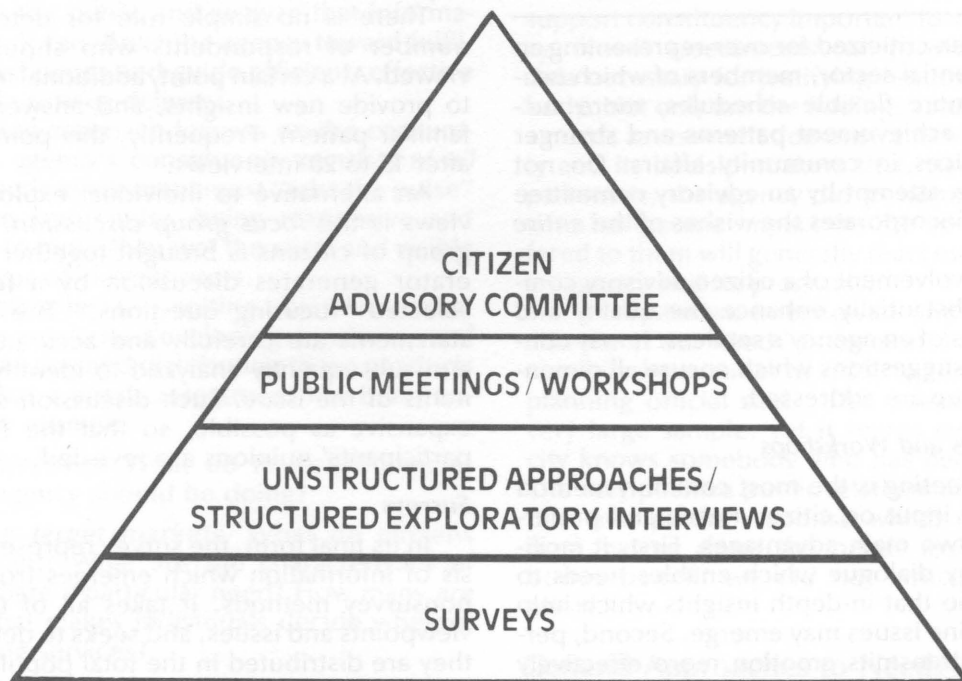
- some groups have no transportation to service offerings.
- the facilities are poor and unattractive.
- staff members are not friendly or responsive to clients.
- costs of travel or admission are too high.

Appropriate questions reflecting these suspicions may then be inserted into a survey. Survey results will identify which suspicions constitute the most substantial barriers. The department then develops an action plan aimed at reducing the impacts of the most substantial barriers, thereby increasing usership.

But the department's action plan may miss the mark if the agency failed to solicit input from citizens. If it had sought their input, citizens may have suggested other major reasons for limited or nonuse:

- lack of interest in existing offerings;
- negative feelings about others who participate in programs;
- concern for personal safety at facilities.

If these limiting factors are not included in the survey, then because the action plan to reduce the impact of constraints is based on the survey's findings, it will not include them either. Hence, these problems, which may be of greater importance than those included in the survey, will remain unaddressed.



*Figure 1. Citizen Involvement Pyramid.*



## PREPARING TO DO A NEEDS ASSESSMENT SURVEY

When an issue has been fully defined with citizen input and the agency believes it is aware of all needs and viewpoints, it is time to undertake a needs assessment survey. While a survey which is done right is the single best approach to assessing citizens' needs and preferences, many surveys are of no value. These fall into two categories:

1. They are *useless* because they don't provide management with information that can be used to improve service delivery.
2. They *misinform* and *mislead*. Doing a poor survey may be worse than doing no survey at all. It's not just a waste of time and energy — it may shoot your agency off in the wrong direction. For example: A recreation and parks agency mailed 20,000 questionnaires and got back 1,970. The cost, time and effort in managing both the initial logistics of this exercise and the subsequent data analysis of this large number of responses was considerable. It was likely to be a poor investment of resources even if the results appeared to provide usable information. Research has shown that the 10 percent who did respond to the survey are likely to have very different opinions, attitudes and interests from the 90 percent who did not respond. To use the data from these 1,970 respondents to guide service delivery priorities and actions may lead to thoroughly inappropriate service delivery decisions. The agency may have been much better served by ignoring the survey results, or better still, by not having undertaken a survey in the first place.

It is not just response rates which may cause data to be biased and thus to misinform, it's also the way in which questions are written, the way they are asked, and the method by which respondents are selected to receive the survey.

If all of the people in a population are interviewed, then the survey is called a *census*. Usually, neither the time nor the resources are available to

make a census, so only a *sample* of the population is interviewed, and its answers are used to represent the whole population. A sample survey is like taking a spoonful of soup from a bowl. *If the soup has been thoroughly stirred*, then this spoonful will represent accurately the soup's taste. Similarly, for a sample survey of residents to be representative, members of the population must be selected according to statistical techniques in such a way that they represent the entire population.

### Why Don't Agencies Make More Use of Needs Assessment Surveys?

Although the value of needs assessment surveys seems obvious, many agencies never undertake them. Surveys are either ignored or carried out in a perfunctory way. Why?

- *Lack of self-confidence.* To many, research appears frightening and complex. Don't be intimidated! The complexity usually revolves around the use of advanced statistical techniques which *are not necessary* for your purposes.
- *Lack of time or money.* A needs assessment does take time and money, but not as much of either as most people imagine. In view of the potential benefits to effective decisionmaking, the investment in time and money is well spent.
- *Service overload.* Generally, a survey causes citizens to expect their service requests to be optimally met. Managers often say, "We're serving more people than we can handle right now, we sure don't need to take on any new prospects." In fact, the *termination* and *reduction* of services is as much a concern in needs assessments as the expansion and development of new services. Assessments may demonstrate which resources should be reallocated.

- *Availability of service standards.* While standards offer a yardstick for measuring overall service levels, people, not facilities, are really the focus and purpose of a parks and recreation system, and their needs are not standard. Needs assessments indicate how the public's diverse needs and preferences can be met.

- *Disappointing experiences.* If previous assessments have been disappointing, the problem may lie in the way the survey was conducted, not the approach. Review past efforts and make the necessary adjustments.

There are trade-offs because doing a needs assessment means taking resources away from some other effort. To be successful, a needs assessment survey requires an extensive commitment from administrators. The information gained can, however, ultimately save an agency time and money and lead to the best possible program decisions.

## What Do You Want to Learn?

Determining the specific purpose of your survey is the important first step. Do not begin a needs assessment survey until you can state in writing why it is being done. Without this specific purpose at the outset, your survey is likely to join the many surveys which are shelved when completed because the information was not in a form the agency could use. Be sure that you're not doing the survey because: "It would be nice to know something about our customers," or "It seems like a good idea to get the public involved."

Consider the purpose and specific use which will be made of the information the survey will yield. Setting specific objectives for the survey is an often difficult but crucial task; it dictates the questions which are to be included and the usefulness of the data. If the goals are too broad and general, the survey's results are likely to be difficult to interpret and implement because they don't relate to specific issues.

Here are some of the objectives used by the Austin, Texas, Parks and Recreation Department (PARC) to guide its needs assessment surveys:

### Overall Objectives

1. To provide the data necessary to facilitate development of the department's new master plan.
2. To solicit information which will assist in making future management or marketing decisions.

### Specific Objectives

1. To identify the priorities of citizens in each geographic zone and in different sociodemograph-

ic groups for:

- a) New or renovated facilities, amenities and services in their planning district.
  - b) The allocation of PARC tax funds for the services the department offers.
2. To solicit citizen guidance as to the future direction of the department as a provider, facilitator or outreach agency.
  3. To increase understanding of why many citizens of Austin do not take advantage of the services and facilities offered by the department.
  4. To identify the level of prices acceptable to users of specific types of recreation facilities and services.
    - a) To identify the level of tax support acceptable to nonusers.
  5. To measure the extent of constituency use and support for each of the types of service offered by the department.

No attempt was made to meet all of the specific objectives in one survey. If this were done, the limited information gained in each area could be only general and superficial. Rather, each of these objectives guided and directed a separate needs assessment survey to enable management decisions to be made with confidence in each area.

The Metropolitan Dade County Parks and Recreation Department addressed the following specific questions in its needs assessment surveys:

1. To what extent do citizens use public park and recreation facilities in Metropolitan Dade County? (That is, what is the existing market size?)
2. Which subgroups of citizens use particular types of facilities and with whom do participants associate at leisure sites? (That is, identification of target markets and primary beneficiaries.)
3. Why don't citizens make more use of Dade County's park and recreation facilities? (That is, what obstacles need to be surmounted so that the existing market can be expanded?)
4. Which types of facilities do citizens most want to see improved or expanded in the future? Concern is both with allocation of resources for operating and maintaining existing facilities and services *and* with allocation of capital resources to possible future facility and service options.

Identifying the target markets, the inhibitors preventing market expansion and the expressed facility/service wants and preferences of Dade County citizens now and for the future, provides a marketing orientation. This enables the department to design its facilities and services and allocate its resources so they are more congruent with citizen desires.

An auxiliary purpose of the study was to provide



baseline data which could be used by the department in future periodic reassessments, to discover changes in its clientele's behavior.

## Which Survey Method Should Be Used?

Four major alternative survey methods may be used to gather information for needs assessments. They are:

- Mail questionnaire;
- Personally delivered, self-administered questionnaire;
- Telephone interviews;
- Personal interviews.

No method can be considered "best" in all situations. The objectives of the study, the nature of the information to be gathered and the resources available will help decide which method is most useful.

### *Mail Questionnaires*

The questionnaire is sent to the sample, accompanied by a cover letter explaining briefly the survey's purpose, the agency involved and the importance of the contact's response. A self-addressed stamped envelope is enclosed. Since mail questionnaires may have relatively low response rates, using a business-reply mailing permit is likely to be least expensive since the charges are imposed only for the questionnaires returned.

#### Advantages:

- Least expensive method to reach selected respondents.
- Allows contact with many households in an extended geographical area.
- Requires least manpower and skill to administer and eliminates the need for training interviewers.
- Enables a respondent to reflect on questions before responding.
- Most likely to be successful in obtaining input from all family members, if such information is sought.

#### Disadvantages:

- Low rate of return. Using traditional approaches, it has been found that mail questionnaires to a general public often have response rates of 30 to 35 percent. This percentage is likely to be even lower if the survey is simply included with a utility bill or similar notice, since the questionnaire may then receive only secondary attention. The problem with low response rates is that those who complete the survey may have very different reactions than those who do not respond. Typically, low-income, low-educated or older persons and nonusers of

recreation and park facilities are less likely to respond to a survey. Hence, the results may be biased and the information of doubtful value. This problem can be attacked three ways:

1. Oversample the groups least likely to respond.
  2. Send follow-up letters with another questionnaire to those who don't respond.
  3. Sample those who don't respond to see if their opinions differ from those who did respond.
- Delay in receiving completed questionnaires. If two follow-ups are used, the time between the first mailing and an effective end of the returns may be 2 or 3 months.

Recent developments have greatly improved the traditional response rates of mail surveys. These techniques are explained in Don A. Dillman's book, *Mail and Telephone Surveys: The Total Design Method*. Mail surveys following Dillman's total design method have frequently resulted in very high response rates.

### *Personally Delivered, Self-Administered Questionnaires*

In this case, a questionnaire is personally handed to respondents at their home or on-site. Respondents are informed of the study's purpose and a commitment is sought from them to complete the questionnaire within a given period. This advanced commitment and the personal contact usually lead to a substantially higher proportion of questionnaires being returned than would be achieved by mailing the questionnaire. A less effective approach than personal delivery (which nevertheless is an improvement on simply mailing the questionnaire) is to telephone intended recipients seeking a commitment that the questionnaire will be filled out before mailing it to them.

The questionnaire can also be picked up personally by a staff member, mailed back in a return envelope, or handed in at deposit boxes within the facility, usually at exit points.

The pros and cons of this approach are similar to those of mail questionnaires with the following exceptions.

#### Advantage:

- Higher return rates. Typically, response rates range from 50 to 75 percent depending upon which return method is used.

#### Disadvantages:

- Increased costs are incurred by the need to travel and to use more employee time to deliver (and, in some cases, to pick up) the questionnaires.
- In on-site surveys, it is difficult to distribute the questionnaires so that a representative sample of

users is selected.

### **Telephone Interviews**

Use of the telephone to conduct needs assessment surveys has increased in recent years primarily because phone interviews are more convenient and cheaper than personal interviews.

#### Advantages:

- The logistics and supervision are easier to manage.
- Response rates are substantially higher than mail questionnaires.
- Information is collected fastest.
- The major cost is paying telephone interviewers. If existing staff can be temporarily assigned to this task, then the agency's additional cost of doing the survey is minimal.

#### Disadvantages:

- Excludes those who do not have phones. However, in most areas, more than 95 percent of households have phones. Households without phones are probably low-income, so some over-sampling of low-income households may be required to ensure they are adequately represented.
- If the sample is selected randomly from the phone book, those with unlisted numbers will be excluded. One report estimated that unlisted numbers were as high as 33 percent of total phones in Los Angeles; 25 percent in Washington, D.C.; 23 percent in San Francisco; and 21 percent in New York City.<sup>1</sup> This problem can be overcome by selecting respondents *not* from a phone book, but by randomly dialing within a telephone exchange district and interviewing appropriate members of those households.
- Interview length should not exceed 10 minutes. If the interview is longer some respondents are likely to become annoyed or impatient.
- Young people and females are more likely to answer household phones than other members of the family. Hence, the desired age and sex compilation of the sample needs to be structured ahead of time to ensure it is representative.

### **Personal Interviews**

A personal interview is conducted on a face-to-face basis by an interviewer who verbally administers the questionnaire. Such interviewers need to be trained in the specifics of the questionnaire and in interview procedures.

<sup>1</sup>Webb, Kenneth and Harry P. Hatry. *Obtaining Citizen Feedback: The Application of Citizen Surveys to Local Governments*. (Washington D.C.: The Urban Institute, 1973) p. 47.

#### Advantages:

- Response rates are likely to be high, frequently 85 to 90 percent. Respondents are less likely to turn down an interviewer on their doorsteps than they are to throw away mail questionnaires or hang up telephones.
- More complex information can be gathered because it can be explained to respondents and, if necessary, the survey's language can be adapted to their educational level. Visual material can also be used in the interview.
- Interviews can be much longer since face-to-face contact increases the attention span of respondents.

#### Disadvantages:

- The major disadvantage is cost, which is much higher than for the other methods.
- If household interviews are conducted during the normal 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. work period, a biased sample will result; housewives will make up the majority of the sample and most working males and females will be excluded.

### **How Much Will It Cost?**

Clearly, it is difficult to generalize about costs. However, before a survey is undertaken some determination must be made of cost and staff time which may be committed to the project, since this will impact many subsequent decisions in implementing the survey. The main expenditures in a needs assessment survey are for:

- overall supervision and planning by the project director (and possibly fees to consultants),
- training and supervision of the interviewers,
- salaries of the interviewers,
- verification and coding of the questionnaire,
- data processing,
- secretarial and clerical services, and
- suppliers.

The cost of a needs assessment survey may range from a few hundred to tens of thousands of dollars. The cost in any situation depends upon:

- the type of survey,
- the size of the sample,
- the length of the questionnaire.

The most expensive type of survey involves contracting with a professional market research company. Typically, the company would design the questionnaire, select the sample, collect the data and provide frequency distributions and cross-tabulations of the results. Companies do not usual-



ly undertake further analysis or provide any discussion of the implications of the data. The following average prices were compiled from quotes provided by professional market research firms in 1983. They assume a sample size of 300 (a typical number) and a questionnaire which takes 10 minutes to complete:

	<u>Total Cost</u>	<u>Per Person Contact Cost</u>
Mail Questionnaire	\$ 2,700	\$ 9.00
Telephone Interviews	5,500	18.33
Personal Interviews	22,000	73.33

*Table 1. Costs of Needs Assessment Surveys.*

Note:

1. These are *contact costs*, not *response costs*. Mail questionnaires appear to be the least expensive, but if only 50 percent of citizens return them, the per-response cost of the mail questionnaire rises from \$9 to \$18. If the response rate falls to 33 percent, then the per-response cost increases to \$27. In such situations, telephone interviews may be less expensive.

2. The telephone and personal interviews assume a *90 percent incidence*. Ninety percent incidence is a situation where 90 percent of people selected in the sample will be home and available when the telephone call or personal visit is made. If this is higher and more than 10 percent of the sample require follow-up calls or visits to secure their response, the price would increase.

3. The personal interview cost assumes that the population is confined to the boundaries of a single city and that the sample is random. If the sample were clustered then costs would be reduced. (This is discussed later in the section on *Sampling*).

Using a professional market research firm to do a needs assessment survey is likely to produce the best results, for such companies have the expertise to ensure that the information collected is valid and representative. Such firms can be expensive, and some agencies may have difficulty persuading their boards to make an investment of this magnitude. The alternatives include:

- Using existing staff to do the needs assessment in-house. This assumes the expertise is available.
- Hiring additional temporary staff to do the survey.
- Soliciting and obtaining a donation of expertise from a major corporation. This is exactly the kind of assistance many corporations are willing to provide to public agencies.
- Contracting with a local university to assist with the project. The marketing, political science, sociology and recreation and park departments of

universities frequently are looking for "live" research projects in which to involve their graduate students. The agency should check that the professor is knowledgeable and experienced in doing needs assessment surveys. Given that condition, since it is a legitimate and exciting learning experience for students, the cost of their labor will be low.

The Austin Park and Recreation Department used a combination of three of these alternatives to undertake a major needs assessment survey:

- The staff provided overall direction to the study, managed the logistics and resources, and guided administrative and supervisory functions throughout the data collection process.
- Additional temporary staff workers were hired to conduct personal interviews and implement public involvement procedures.
- A faculty member and five graduate students from a local university designed and pilot-tested the questionnaires, analyzed the data, and produced reports stating the findings, conclusions and implications.

The Austin needs assessment involved several types of surveys:

- 3,600 personal household interviews,
- 2,600 personally delivered, mail-back questionnaires,
- 990 on-site personal interviews,
- 700 questionnaires completed by grade school students in their classrooms.

The approximate costs of this total project conducted in the summer of 1980 were:

Existing staff in-house time	\$ 50,000
Temporary staff hired for the needs assessment (interviewers, resident aides, coders)	41,000
Local university faculty member and graduate students in-kind time	15,000
Supplies (computer time, printing, postage)	10,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$116,000</b>

*Table 2. Cost of Austin needs assessment surveys.*

Does this cost sound exorbitant? Think about it in percentage terms and scale it to your own agency. Including all the in-kind labor time devoted to the project, this represents 1.25 percent of the Austin Park and Recreation Department's annual operating budget. This amounts to 33 cents per resident. If annual capital improvement expenditures were included, this percentage would be even lower. Few successful commercial enterprises would consider spending so little on market research. They recognize that to remain successful in today's dynamic marketplace, a substantially greater proportion of their budget must be invested in research.

## How Long Will the Survey Take?

The time needed to do a survey depends upon the method used, the resources available, the level of detail required, and the length of the questionnaire. The mail questionnaire is likely to require the longest period, several months. Time must be allocated for:

- Designing and pretesting the questionnaire,
- Obtaining sampling frames and selecting the sample,
- Preparing the surveys for mailing,
- Waiting for questionnaires to be returned (about 2 weeks for each mailing),
- Coding and analyzing the data,
- Writing the report and presenting the findings.

Telephone surveys and personal interviews generally take less time, but they may be more costly in other ways.

A period of 6 to 9 months may be required from the initial decision to the final production of the report describing the analyses, findings and application.

## Management of Interviewers

If a mail survey is used, no interviews are required. However, use of telephone or personal interviewers involves the agency in the recruitment, remuneration, training, management and monitoring of interviewers.

Use these tips for managing interviewers:

- Hire experienced interviewers (such as prior Bureau of Census canvassers) if possible.
- Provide sufficient orientation and initial training.

- Interviewers should, if possible, be culturally representative of the survey area and respondents.
- Pretest the survey methodology and interviewers' proficiencies.
- Survey the easiest areas first and incrementally move on to the more difficult. This prepares the interviewers.
- Be prepared for dropouts; provide for substitutes.
- Meet routinely with interviewers to discuss problems and provide additional training.
- Provide a reasonable, equitable pay rate.

## So Which Survey Method Should I Use?

The selection of a specific survey method will depend on which factors or characteristics are salient to the purpose of the survey. As stated at the beginning of this section, no method is "best" in all situations. However, in most cases, the personal interview is the most accurate and reliable approach.

In Austin the Parks and Recreation Department concluded that home interviews were the only way to gather some of the information required. For example, the survey used photographs to seek citizen guidance in determining appropriate maintenance levels for parks, and this could only be done with personal interviews. In addition, some of the questions were complex and needed further explanation in some areas of the city.

Any number of combinations of survey methods may be employed. The purpose of the survey and the agency's capabilities determine what is best for its needs.

## DESIGNING THE QUESTIONNAIRE

Information is collected from respondents through the use of a questionnaire. This can be geared to whichever survey method is to be used. Detailed discussion of questionnaire design is beyond the scope of this handbook, but the major points are described briefly in this chapter.

Designing an effective questionnaire can be a frustrating task. It takes effort and time and should not be rushed. But remember, all of the resources invested in collecting, analyzing and presenting the information will not pay off if the questionnaire is not carefully and systematically developed.

Sample recreation and park needs assessment questionnaires are included in Appendix B. The issues and concerns are never the same in any two

communities. Each agency has to tailor needs assessment surveys to the unique set of conditions existing in its community. However, the format, instructions, sequencing patterns and wording used successfully by others may be adapted for use in your own survey.

## Introductory Comments and the Cover Letter

The introductory comments should:

- establish the identity and legitimacy of the interviewer,
- communicate the purpose of the survey,
- motivate a respondent to cooperate,



- explain to a respondent how he or she was selected.

Suggested approaches for the personal and telephone interview methods may be found in the questionnaire examples in Appendix B. A cover letter accompanies the mail questionnaire. An example of a cover letter is included in Appendix C. This appendix also includes a sample follow-up cover letter which is used in an effort to elicit responses from people who failed to respond to the first mailing of the questionnaire.

## Question Content

There are three concerns about content which should be considered in the development of each question to be included in a needs assessment survey:

1. *Is the question necessary?* Earlier in the handbook, the importance of establishing objectives for the survey was emphasized. Each proposed question should be assessed against the objectives to see if it is really necessary. *The acid test is, "What will be done with the information from this question?"* If there is no clearly defined use, then the question should be omitted. Any questions which produce information that is merely interesting are of no value. At the same time, the agency should be sure that sufficient questions are included to ensure that all of the survey's objectives can be fulfilled.

2. *Does the respondent have the ability to answer accurately?* Frequently, respondents are asked questions they can't be expected to answer accurately. Nevertheless, they will give answers. By giving inaccurate "guess" answers they become a source of error in the survey. For example, leisure questionnaires sometimes ask citizens how often they used a particular type of facility during the past year. An accurate answer is unlikely. Think of the leisure facilities which you use. Can you recall how many times you have used them in the past year? More accurate answers are likely to emerge if a respondent is asked, "How frequently do you typically use the following facilities?"

not at	less than once	about once	about once	almost
all	a month	a month	a week	daily

3. *Will respondents provide the information?* The information sought in recreation and park agency surveys is usually neither threatening nor sensitive, so problems of this nature rarely arise. The only questions which citizens may be reluctant to answer are likely to be those seeking personal information, especially income. If such information is not essential to the needs assessment, the questions should be omitted from the survey to avoid offending the respondent.

## Question Phrasing

The language used in a questionnaire must be understood easily and uniformly by all respondents. Use the simplest wording possible which conveys the meaning intended. Always key words to the lowest educational level of the people to be questioned. For example, some of the intended sample may not understand, "What is your marital status?"

Be particularly alert to the danger of using technical jargon. Words which are part of the recreation and park professional's everyday vocabulary may be totally unfamiliar to the average citizen or communicate a different meaning.

## What Kinds of Questions Can Be Used?

Three kinds of questions are used in needs assessment surveys: 1) *open-ended*, 2) *fixed alternative* (sometimes called closed questions) and 3) *scaled*. Although open-ended questions are used frequently, questionnaires are most likely to be comprised predominantly of fixed alternative or scaled questions, for reasons described below. Examples of each can be found in the questionnaires exhibited in Appendix B.

- *Open-Ended Questions.* These questions permit respondents to reply to their own words rather than being limited to a set of alternatives. For example: "What is your favorite leisure activity?" Greater insight is gained into the respondents' frames of reference, what is most important to them and their views. Because a wide variety of responses may be elicited, open-ended questions are particularly useful in the initial needs assessment phase of identifying all dimensions of an issue. These responses guide the formulation of fixed-alternative questions.

Unfortunately, the diversity of responses makes coding the data a more difficult and time-consuming task and in interview situations the interviewers have considerable discretion as to what is recorded. This may be a significant source of error.

- *Fixed-Alternative (Closed) Questions.* These questions offer a respondent predetermined response categories from which he or she must choose an answer. For each question the respondent is instructed to check the box or boxes that apply. The advantages of this type of question are that they are simpler for both the interviewer and the respondent and coding costs and time are reduced. A disadvantage is that offering fixed alternatives forces respondents to give an opinion about an issue on which they may really have no opinion. To avoid this an "undecided" or "no opinion" category is included.

There are no other major disadvantages to fixed alternative questions *if* the following two requirements are met:

—The response categories should be *exhaustive*: they should include all the possible responses that might be expected. If all the dimensions of the issue have been identified by the methods described earlier, this should not be a problem.

—The categories must be *mutually exclusive*; no response should be able to fall into more than one category.

• **Scaled Questions.** Scaled questions are another type of fixed alternative question. For example, one of the sample questionnaires in Appendix B presents a series of recreation and park projects and asks respondents to check the priority the city should give to each in spending the limited available funds. These response categories may have been given in the standard form of fixed alternatives:

very low priority	<input type="checkbox"/>	fairly high priority	<input type="checkbox"/>
fairly low priority	<input type="checkbox"/>	very high priority	<input type="checkbox"/>

However, in the questionnaire they were presented in the following form:

very low priority	fairly low priority	fairly high priority	very high priority
----------------------	------------------------	-------------------------	-----------------------

The advantage of this layout is that the descriptors could be presented at the top of the page and the list of projects along the left margin. The instructions for the question need be given only once at the beginning, and a great deal of information could be received from the respondent in a short period of time.

## In What Order Should Questions Be Asked?

The order in which questions are asked can affect the answers. For example, if questions about park safety are asked at the beginning and respondents are asked later for reasons why they do not visit parks, results may show a greater emphasis on park safety than would otherwise be the case. Begin with questions which will secure respondents' interest and cooperation. Their first impression may determine their level of cooperation. The early questions should be nonthreatening and relax the respondent.

Do not ask sensitive questions, since these may alienate respondents and reduce their inclination to cooperate. If questions seeking information on such items as income or ethnicity are essential, they should be at the end of the questionnaire. In this way, if a respondent is angered and refuses to answer the rest of the questions, less information will be lost.

The questionnaire should end with easy, nonthreatening questions which reduce the likelihood

of a respondent feeling any animosity when the questionnaire has been completed.

## What Does a Questionnaire Look Like?

The layout and appearance of a questionnaire are just as important as the content, phrasing, sequencing and formatting of questions. If layout and appearance are poor, refusals and errors will increase. Visual impact is particularly important for mail and drop-off questionnaires where respondents are left alone to read and respond to them. However, a cluttered, unprofessional questionnaire may cause even trained interviewers to miss questions.

Maximize the white space on a questionnaire to avoid a cluttered look. Keep the questionnaire short, since this will make it easier to complete. Furthermore, the respondent who has spent considerable time on the first page of what seemed a short questionnaire may be more demoralized in comparison to a respondent who quickly completed the first several pages of what initially seemed rather long. Saving space by placing two questions on a single line, abbreviating words or omitting phrases may cause questions to be missed or misinterpreted.

Head each section of the questionnaire with instructions indicating how the answers should be recorded. In addition to basic instructions, begin each section of the questionnaire with a brief introduction explaining its content and purpose. These statements make the questionnaire appear more organized, particularly if a number of topics are covered.

There are three methods available for reproducing the questionnaire. The choice depends on funds.

—*Ditto, mimeograph and photocopies* are usually the least expensive to make, but they lack a professional appearance.

—*Photo offsetting* of typewritten copy improves the quality and may cost less if many copies are required.

—*Set type* printed by offset gives the highest quality of reproduction and most professional appearance, but is more expensive and takes longer to prepare.

The appearance of the questionnaire depends as much on the quality of reproduction as it does on layout. Professional looking forms are likely to persuade more people to cooperate. A poor job of producing the survey may convey to the respondent a lack of real concern for the information. The use of colored paper for mail or drop-off questionnaires increases return. Light blue seems to be the most effective color.

## Beware of "Motherhood" Questions

Sometimes surveys ask, "What recreation activities would you participate in if they were available?" or, if a new service is proposed respondents are asked, "Will you use it?" Questions like these are called "motherhood" questions because they suggest an affirmative response without requiring the respondent to consider the trade-offs involved. Far more people will respond positively to this type of question than would actually use the services because no costs are attached to this use. The question is asked in a vacuum and assesses only general interest. When it is time to actually use the service, the opportunity cost of time, usage price, inadequate access to the service, lack of motivation or numerous other factors may cause the respondent not to follow through.

To avoid "motherhood" questions, always place the respondent in a trade-off situation. For example:

**If the money were available, the city should:**

(Circle only one statement.)

1. Offer service A      2. Offer service B
3. Undecided

Similarly, if respondents are asked: "Are you satisfied with park and recreation department services?" a large majority are likely to respond positively. To conclude from this large positive response that the agency is doing an outstanding job may be entirely inappropriate. Many of those answering positively may be uninformed and completely uninterested in any of the department's services. They answer positively simply because they have no reason to be dissatisfied.

## Pretest and Revision

After carefully crafting the questionnaire through three or four drafts to the point where the designers are satisfied with it, ask others how to further improve it. Solicit this advice sequentially from four sources.

First, give the questionnaire to four or five other people within the agency who have not been involved in its development and ask for their critical comments.

Second, ask selected citizens who are likely to be particularly knowledgeable or interested in the issues the survey addresses to critique the questionnaire. They should be asked to critique content rather than format.

Third, seek the advice of experts in questionnaire development. They may be found not only in universities and colleges, but also in the marketing departments of major local businesses. Ask them to critique format rather than content.

The real test of a questionnaire is how it performs under the conditions of collecting the infor-

mation. A pretest involves using the questionnaire to survey a small segment of the sample population. It should be selected by drawing a subsample of the sample population to be used in the full survey.

A pretest will always improve the questionnaire and the administration techniques. It may reveal:

- Awkward statements or instructions;
- Biased questions;
- How long it takes to complete the survey;
- The response rate which may be expected.

In addition, it gives experience to those who will distribute, collect and code the final survey, so administrative improvements may emerge.

Code and cross-tabulate the results of a pretest. These tables will confirm the need for each specific piece of information. Trial cross-tabulation will demonstrate that all information collected will be used and that all necessary information will be obtained.

## Validity and Reliability

The two requirements for a survey are that its findings be valid and reliable.

- **Validity** is how well responses to questions measure what they are supposed to measure. Consider the earlier example in which an agency wants to know why citizens don't make more use of its services. Some of the possible reasons were omitted from the questionnaire, so erroneous conclusions were reached. This survey was not valid. That is, the responses were not measuring what the agency thought they were measuring.

"Motherhood" questions, which because of their wording suggest a bias in a particular direction, also are likely to have low validity.

Assessing validity is a complex technical issue. Validity can never be proved, but there is a burden on the agency to establish that an effort has been made to ensure the questions accurately capture the variables of interest.

- **Reliability** is whether the questionnaire can produce consistent results if it is administered repeatedly. That is, would citizens give the same answers if they were asked the same question again, even by a different agency or interviewer? Reliability tries to assess how much of the variation in scores among individuals occurs because of inconsistencies in measurement.

It is laborious and usually impractical to survey the same person twice to estimate reliability of the questions. Fortunately, there are statistical methods available to assess reliability without doing this. If you ask an experienced researcher for advice *before* you administer the questionnaire, he or she can tell you how reliability can be assessed.



## SELECTING THE SAMPLE

Once you decide to undertake a survey, the next question to address is, "Who should be surveyed?" Consider this question in two parts:

1. How many people should be selected?
2. What methods should be used to select them?

### How Many People Should Be Selected?

Sampling decisions are technically complex, and if they are not correct the findings of a survey are not likely to be useful. Experienced surveyors seek the advice of a professional statistician at this point to determine an appropriate sample size.

An agency seeks to survey as few people as are necessary to secure accuracy. Large numbers are not likely to be required. The minimum size sample will vary according to the precision the surveyor seeks and the method used to select respondents. Interestingly, it is incorrect to assume that a substantially larger sample is needed for larger cities. Provided a city is not extremely small, size will have little impact upon the number of responses required to achieve reasonable precision. This may be explained by the following illustration:

Suppose a barrel is filled with 10,000 marbles, half red and half white. From this barrel a sample of 400 marbles is drawn, and the sample is divided 50-50. A very similar sample result would probably occur if the 400 marbles were taken from a barrel containing 100,000 red and white marbles or one containing one million red and white marbles.

Table 3 shows the general relationship between sample size and the sampling error for different sized jurisdictions. The table suggests that for a city of 3,000, a sample of 517 will give results accurate to within plus or minus four percent, whereas a city or county of 500,000 requires a sample of only 625 (that is 108 more respondents) to also give results accurate to within plus or minus four percent.

A sampling error of  $\pm$  four percent means that if 50 percent of the sample say they have visited a city park within the last month, then the "true" percentage could be as low as 46 percent or as high as 54 percent if all households in the jurisdiction had been surveyed. It is important to recognize that this four percent error limit refers to a maximum *absolute* percentage error. For example, if 20 percent state they have visited a city park within the last month, and a four percent error limit was used, the maximum range of tolerance is  $\pm$  four percent, that is, 16 percent to 24 percent. In fact, these ranges offer the worst case and the true error is likely to be smaller than the maximums shown in Table 3, since in calculating those error rates the largest possible variance has been assumed.

Obviously, the smaller the error range, the more reliable the survey results. For recreation and park agency needs assessment surveys, extremely high levels of precision (to within three percent accuracy) in the findings often are not necessary. A moderate error range will frequently be acceptable. This means that a sample of only a few hundred citizens, *if scientifically selected*, may represent the city.

Size of Population in the Study Area	Percentage Error Rate (Plus or Minus)				
	1%	2%	3%	4%	5%
1,000	*	*	*	385	286
2,000	*	*	714	476	333
3,000	*	1,364	811	517	353
4,000	*	1,538	870	541	364
5,000	*	1,667	909	556	370
10,000	5,000	2,000	1,000	588	385
20,000	6,667	2,222	1,053	606	392
25,000	7,143	2,273	1,064	610	394
50,000	8,333	2,381	1,087	617	397
100,000	9,091	2,439	1,099	621	398
500,000	9,804	2,488	1,101	625	400

\*In these cases more than 50 percent of the occupied households in the study area are required in the sample.

Table 3. Size of Sample Necessary to be Fairly Sure (19 Chances in 20) of Accuracy to Within Specified Limits, Assuming a Randomly Selected Sample.

If there is an interest in differences between subgroups of the population, such as race, age, sex, or areas of the city, a larger sample will be required. If the number of respondents in each subgroup is too small, the error margin for the results relating to that subgroup may be unacceptably high. In Austin's citizen survey, the recreation and park agency conducted 3,600 interviews to examine differences in needs in each of the ten zones. This meant that at least 350 to 400 people had to be interviewed in each zone for the results to be reasonably representative of the views and opinions of all the people in each zone.

## Sampling Methods

Sampling techniques for selecting respondents are classified as either probability or non-probability. Figure 2 illustrates the most commonly used probability and non-probability sampling methods. The major distinction between the two categories is that in a probability sample each citizen in the population has a known chance or probability of being selected for the sample. Given this condition, probability sampling is a much more effective method for selecting study respondents for two reasons:

1. It eliminates bias which could influence the selection of sample respondents.
2. It allows the researcher to measure the precision of sample estimates.

The key to the process of probability sampling is random selection which, as previously mentioned, means that every citizen or household has a known chance of being included in the sample.

### Probability Sampling

The first task in probability sampling is to establish a *sampling frame*. This is the list from which the sample is to be selected. It may be a telephone book, a map of city streets or blocks, a voters' list, city directory or a registration list.

There are three types of probability samples. In a *random sample*, all units in the population have an equal chance of being chosen. A table of random numbers frequently is used to select respondents from a list of all potential candidates. Metropolitan Dade County Park and Recreation Department in Florida used a random sample in two needs assessment surveys which it conducted in 1980.

All telephone exchanges in the county, except those within the central business districts, or those dedicated to a single function (for example, universities or government agencies) were identified, and this list served as the sampling frame. Respondents from at least five households in each telephone

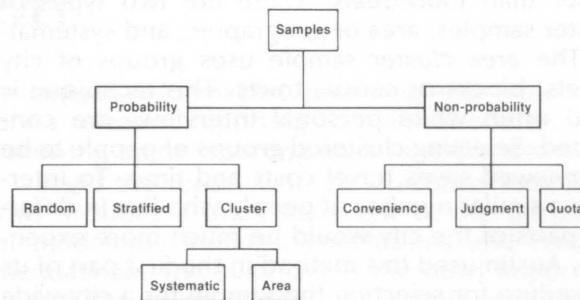


Figure 2. Alternative sampling methods.

exchange area were interviewed. Nonresidential numbers were eliminated by a screening question asked whoever answered the call.

Figure 2. Alternative Sampling Methods.

Selection of households within each telephone exchange was random. A random digit dialing technique was used. A set of random numbers, consisting of four digits each, was used to select the last four digits of each number dialed. The household member who answered the phone was interviewed if he or she sounded at least 18 years of age.

A *stratified sample* is used when proportionate representation is sought from various segments of the population. This technique entails dividing the population into groups or strata based upon a characteristic. Examples of strata may be age strata (18 to 25, 26 to 35, 36 to 45) income strata (less than \$8,000, \$9,000 to 15,000, \$16,000 to 23,000), or activity strata (golfers, tennis players, swimmers, park goers). Once the strata have been identified, a predetermined number of respondents are selected randomly from each stratum.

For example, in the Dade County study described above, the basic sampling procedure was slightly modified to ensure an adequate number of respondents from minority groups to make the analysis representative. In a previous 1979 study undertaken by the department, for which the data were also gathered by telephone, the final sample reflected an undersampling of blacks, and to a lesser extent Hispanics, in proportion to their presence in the county population (presumably because more citizens in these groups did not own a telephone). Accordingly, while at least five responses were gathered from each telephone exchange, those exchanges which previously had been found to have a higher proportion of minorities were oversampled to offset the undersampling in the 1979 survey.

*Cluster sampling* entails sampling from groups rather than individuals. There are two types of cluster samples, area or geographic, and systematic. The *area cluster* sample uses groups of city streets, blocks or census tracts. This technique is used often when personal interviews are conducted. Selecting clustered groups of people to be interviewed saves travel costs and time. To interview a similar number of people who live in different parts of the city would be much more expensive. Austin used this method in the first part of its procedure for selecting the sample for a city-wide needs assessment, which was conducted by personal interview.

The clusters were city blocks. The budget limits would permit 400 interviews to be conducted in each of the ten planning zones into which the city was subdivided. Within each of the ten planning zones, all residential blocks were located on a census map. The map identified each city residential block. The blocks were assigned a sequential number from one through N (N being the total number of blocks in the zone).

A computer random number generating program was used to obtain 87 random numbers within the range one through N. The first 57 of these numbers were used to select the blocks to be sampled. The remaining 30 numbers were used to select blocks as alternates if one or more of the first 57 blocks was unacceptable. The most frequent cause for rejecting a block was simply a lack of residential dwellings on it. The census maps did not distinguish between developed and undeveloped subdivisions and sometimes an interviewer would arrive at an assigned block to find only an open field. A designated block was also rejected when it contained less than seven individual dwelling units.

On each randomly selected block, seven household units were sampled. The method for determining which seven dwellings would be sampled was to count all dwelling units on the block and divide by seven. The answer indicated how many dwelling units to bypass before sampling a unit.

A *systematic cluster sample* involves selecting every Nth subject from a list of possible candidates. The selection of houses on each block in Austin used this procedure. Frequently, this method is adopted to select respondents from voters' lists, telephone directories, registration lists or tax polls.

### ***Nonprobability Sampling***

Probability sampling techniques ensure greater representation and are preferred usually. However, cost limitations may prohibit the use of probability sampling, or representativeness may not be

critical. On these occasions, a method of non-probability sampling may be considered.

The three most commonly used nonprobability methods are convenience, judgment (sometimes called *purposive*) and quota sampling. As the name implies, a *convenience sample* is selected on the basis of convenience or accessibility. For example, a survey regarding a bond issue may be conducted using the first 100 persons entering city hall as the sample. In this case some people have a very high probability of being selected while the probability for others is zero. Surveys printed in newspapers are also convenience samples. The major limitation of convenience sampling is that the results are unrepresentative. For this reason, convenience sampling is considered generally inappropriate except for exploratory studies and questionnaire pre-testing.

*Judgment sampling* entails selecting respondents based upon their reputation as being knowledgeable about the issues of concern, or because they represent certain groups. City council members and community leaders, for example, might be surveyed regarding the likelihood of a bond issue passing. The rationale for selecting this sample would be their awareness of the voting tendencies of the public. Since judgment sample selection is subjective and not random, results cannot be assumed to be representative. For this reason, judgment sampling is generally recommended for only exploratory research and questionnaire pre-testing.

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## ***Probability sampling techniques ensure greater representation and are preferred usually.***

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*Quota sampling* is the most commonly used nonprobability sampling technique. It is used when there is reason to believe that some segments of the population, for example, minorities, senior citizens or low-income groups, will be under-represented if other sampling techniques are used. It entails selecting a sample to represent characteristics of interest in the needs assessment sample in the same proportion as they exist in the population. There are similarities between quota sampling and stratified sampling techniques. Both methods involve division of the population into segments and the selection of elements from each segment. The major difference, though, is that sample elements are selected on a probabilistic basis with stratified examples, but they are selected by personal judgment in quota samples.



# COMPLETING AND EVALUATING THE SURVEY

## Completing the Survey

After the information-gathering steps of a survey, you must analyze the data to make recommendations and, ultimately, report the findings and recommendations to decisionmakers.

### Analysis and Recommendations

*Analysis* entails converting tabulated data into conclusions. Data are interpreted by agency staff to determine public needs and preferences, discern trends and suggest necessary service modifications.

The overall objectives of the needs assessment are to: 1) identify problems and issues, 2) draw conclusions based on those findings, 3) to generate policy alternatives to deal with those issues, and 4) to advance preferred alternatives or recommendations. As stated in the Austin Parks and Recreation master plan, "This process established a framework for development of parks and recreation policies and standards affecting future direction of the department. The policy plan, therefore, is viewed as the first major effort in preparing the Austin Parks and Recreation Plan. With official acceptance and adoption of a policy plan, the department will then receive guidance for developing an action plan."

The product of analysis is a list of recommended actions. The list describes actions to provide the services the public has indicated, through the needs assessment, that it wants. Recommendations are presented in a report.

### Reporting the Findings

A report is vital to the success of your research effort. No matter how good the needs assessment, if the findings are not read by the decisionmakers, or if the results are misinterpreted, then the work has been wasted.

Reports are often criticized as too long and too technical. It is unforgivable to bore the readers of a report. Write the problem and findings from the perspective of the reader and his or her need for information. Resist the inclination to report at length the details of technique and methodology. Details are best relegated to the appendices.

The final report is written to communicate. It does not seek to be a literary production. Use language which is familiar to the reader and minimize the use of technical language and professional jargon.

The nature of the intended audience should dictate the structure and style of the report. Findings and recommendations may be reported for:

briefing decisionmakers, providing information for press releases, reporting to political bodies, and following up or reporting back to respondents.

*Begin* the report with an *executive summary*. This includes a brief statement of the purpose, methodology, findings, conclusions and recommendations. The summary is the most important part of the report. It does not include everything, but gives only the highpoints. Executive summaries are prepared because many people have neither the time nor the interest to read a detailed report.

Write the report objectively, giving facts rather than personal judgments. Normally, reports are written in the third person, eliminating the need to use "I" or "we." The past tense is adopted because you are describing an activity which has already taken place.

If the report doesn't look good, its credibility will be challenged. The appearance of a report is the reader's first impression of it and influences the state of mind with which it is read.

A long report will discourage the reader. Always include copies of data-gathering instruments and details of data analysis in technical appendices, not in the body of the report. This provides the reader access to the information without interrupting the narrative flow of the report. Point out briefly the shortcomings and limitations of the research so the reader is not misled, particularly with regard to weaknesses in sampling or data collection procedures.

Finally, most readers find charts and graphs more helpful than tables and statistics. Any findings that lend themselves to charts, maps, diagrams or similar techniques should be illustrated. The cliché, "one picture is worth a thousand words," certainly applies to needs assessment reports.

### Evaluating Needs Assessment Studies

The final step in a needs assessment, regardless of which method is used, is to evaluate the effectiveness of the survey.

Familiarity with the major steps in research enables the effective manager to plan needs assessment efforts and to evaluate their results. Appendix A provides a structured framework for these purposes.

Needs assessment is a *process*, not just a product. And it is an ongoing process, for staying in touch with your clients is a continuous responsibility. The desires and preferences of your users are continually changing. Your services should change with the needs of your clients. This is client orientation.

The needs assessment is crucial to the effectiveness of your marketing program. Through the needs assessment process you will develop a closer relationship with your users and you will know more about them. You will also have a better idea

of how well your agency is doing its job of serving them.

Give needs assessment a try. It's one of the key first steps to client-oriented service. See what it can do for you.

## APPENDICES

### Appendix A

#### ***A Checklist for Evaluating Needs Assessment Surveys***

If the answers to all appropriate questions are "yes," the chances are good that the research being evaluated will serve its purpose. Any questions that must be answered "no" should lead to appropriate revisions. "Don't know" responses should be investigated further by seeking the assistance of other experts in the needs assessment field. (This checklist has been adapted from Stephen Isaac and William D. Michael, *Handbook in Research and Evaluation*, San Diego: Robert R. Knapp, 1971.)

	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>	<u>Comments</u>
1. Was the problem and/or purpose of the study clearly and accurately stated?				
2. Were specific information needs clearly and accurately stated?				
3. Were the issues selected for study relevant and clearly defined?				
4. Does the value of the information exceed its cost?				
5. Are assumptions clearly and accurately stated?				
6. Are limitations clearly and accurately stated?				
7. If secondary data were used, were they:				
(a) reasonably current?				
(b) impartial?				
(c) accurate?				
8. If primary data were used:				
(a) were acceptable secondary data unavailable?				
(b) were data collection procedures clear and appropriate?				
(c) were data collection methods used properly?				
(d) were interviewers or observers properly selected and trained?				
(e) were interviewers or observers adequately supervised?				
(f) was their work validated?				
9. If surveys were used:				
(a) were questions simple, precise and easy to understand?				
(b) were questions unbiased?				
(c) could respondents reasonably be expected to provide meaningful answers to all questions?				
(d) were survey instruments pretested?				
10. If sampling was used:				
(a) was the study population properly defined?				
(b) was the sample size sufficient?				
(c) was the sampling procedure appropriate?				
(d) was nonresponse bias investigated?				

	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>	<u>Comments</u>
11. Were appropriate data analysis techniques selected?				
12. Are the results of the analysis presented clearly?				
13. Are conclusions clearly stated?				
14. Are conclusions substantiated by the findings?				
15. Is the report clearly written?				
16. Is the report logically organized?				
17. Is the report objective and unbiased?				
18. Are details necessary to evaluate the study included in the text or in appendices?				
19. Does the report include an executive summary?				

## Appendix B

### Sample Questionnaires

	Page
1. Capital and Operating Priorities (telephone interview) .....	B-2
2. Constraints (That is, why citizens do not make more use of park and recreation services.) (telephone interview) .....	B-4
Introductory Section to Samples 3 through 6, Austin, Texas Parks and Recreation Department Citizen Survey .....	B-6
3. Neighborhood Capital and Operating Priorities (personal interview) .....	B-8
4. Delivery Service Instrument (That is, what types of services and delivery modes do citizens prefer?) (personal interview) .....	B-12
5. Park Maintenance (That is, how satisfied are citizens with existing maintenance efforts, and what type of park maintenance do they prefer?) (personal interview) .....	B-15
6. Motivation (That is, what benefits do citizens seek from their park and recreation activities?) (personal interview) .....	B-16

Note: Each of these questionnaires includes a section which asks how frequently respondents participate in the services currently offered by the agency.

For the Austin, Texas examples, the first two pages are common to all questionnaires and are introduced before the administration of questionnaires three through six.



Sample 1

**Capital and Operating Priorities**  
(telephone interview)

Response Number \_\_\_\_\_

Interviewer \_\_\_\_\_

Exchange \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Hello, my name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I work for the Dade County Park and Recreation Department. Will you take a few minutes to answer some questions for me?

First, I am going to read you a list of types of recreation facilities operated by Dade County. Please tell me which of these facilities you have used in the past 12 months:

(Instructions to Interviewer: If the respondent indicates he or she has used the facility, ask how often and check the appropriate column (2 to 4). Do not prompt respondent unless absolutely necessary. If necessary to prompt begin with column 3.)

	Not At All	Less Than Once a Month	More Than Once a Month	More Than Once a Week
_____ Parks and Playgrounds	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____ Tennis Courts	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____ Swimming Pools	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____ Racquetball/Handball Courts	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____ Recreation Center/ Building	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____ Fields for Organized Sports	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____ Bicycle Trails	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____ Basketball	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____ Beaches	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____ Marinas or Boat Ramps	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____ Jogging Trails	_____	_____	_____	_____

Now, I'd like to read the same list to you again and would like you to indicate whether the county should spend more, less or about the same portion of its present budget on each of these facilities. Please remember, the county has a limited amount of money and cannot spend more on everything.

	Spend More	Spend Less	Spend Same	No Opinion
_____ Parks and Playgrounds	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____ Tennis Courts	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____ Swimming Pools	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____ Golf Courses	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____ Racquetball/Handball Courts	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____ Recreation Centers	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____ Fields for Organized Sports	_____	_____	_____	_____

	Spend More	Spend Less	Spend Same	No Opinion
_____ Bicycle Trails	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____ Lake Areas	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____ Beaches	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____ Improve Bay Access	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____ Fishing Piers	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____ Marinas or Boat Ramps	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____ Jogging Trails	_____	_____	_____	_____

(When asking the following questions do *not* offer undecided as an option. Use only if they will not make decision.)

Dade County has to make difficult choices on how to spend its money. Would you encourage it to:

- |          |   |    |   |           |
|----------|---|----|---|-----------|
| _____ 1. | Develop many parks that are used by neighborhood and community residents. | Or | Develop a few larger parks that are used by all county residents.       | Undecided |
| _____ 2. | Fix up or develop existing park and recreation areas.                     | Or | Buy more parkland.  | Undecided |
| _____ 3. | Develop new park and recreation areas.                                    | Or | Fix up existing park and recreation areas.                              | Undecided |
| _____ 4. | Develop permanent recreation areas.                                       | Or | Use mobile recreation trucks so that equipment and programs can travel. | Undecided |
| _____ 5. | Spend more money on recreation activities.                                | Or | Spend more money on building park and recreation areas.                 | Undecided |

To pay for improved recreation and park facilities, would you be willing to pay more local taxes?

_____	_____	_____
Yes	No	Don't Know (maybe)

\_\_\_\_\_ What is your zip code? \_\_\_\_\_

What is your ethnic background?

\_\_\_\_\_ Black \_\_\_\_\_ Latin \_\_\_\_\_ Non-Latin White \_\_\_\_\_ Other \_\_\_\_\_ (list)

\_\_\_\_\_ What is your age? \_\_\_\_\_ years.

Was the combined income of all members of your household more than \$20,000 last year?

(If "yes" ask...)

Yes

Was it more than \$30,000?

Yes No

(circle one)

(If "no" ask...)

No

Was it more than \$12,000?

Yes No

(circle one)

(\_\_\_\_\_ Is the person talking male \_\_\_\_\_ or female \_\_\_\_\_?)

Thank you for your time!

## Sample 2

### Constraints (telephone interview)

Response Number \_\_\_\_\_

Interviewer \_\_\_\_\_

Exchange \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Hello, my name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I work for the Dade County Park and Recreation Department. We are talking to Dade County residents to find out the kind of things people do for recreation. Will you take a few minutes to answer some questions for me?

(Instructions to Interviewer: If the respondent indicates he or she has used the facility, ask how often and check the appropriate column (2 through 4). Do not prompt respondent unless absolutely necessary. If necessary to prompt begin with column 3.)

(If the respondent indicates he or she uses the facility, ask who he or she usually goes with. Place an "A" next to the check if alone, "F" if family, "X" if friends and "B" if both family and friends.)

F = Family

X = Friends

A = Alone

B = Family and Friends

	Not At All	Less Than Once a Month	More Than Once a Month	More Than Once a Week
_____ Parks and Playgrounds	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____ Tennis Courts	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____ Swimming Pools	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____ Golf Course	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____ Racquetball/Handball Courts	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____ Recreation Center/ Building	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____ Fields for Organized Sports	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____ Bicycle Trails	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____ Basketball	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____ Beaches	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____ Marinas or Boat Ramps	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____ Jogging Trails	_____	_____	_____	_____

1) Have you heard about the new Metro Zoo? (circle one)

No

Yes

If "no" go to question #2

If "yes", ask, "Where did you hear about the new Metro Zoo?"

(Check all that apply.)

TV \_\_\_\_\_

Radio \_\_\_\_\_ Family \_\_\_\_\_ Other \_\_\_\_\_

2) What prevents you from using Dade County Park and Recreation facilities more frequently? (Check the correct item(s) on the list of responses in question 3 that best reflect the respondent answer(s) to this question. Check the item in the space on the left-hand side.)



3) Please tell me which of the following reasons prevent you from making more use of Dade County Park and Recreation facilities. For each one I mention just say "yes" if it prevents you from using recreation and park facilities.

	Yes	No	Maybe
I don't know what is going on.			
There are no adult programs.			
I use private recreational facilities and programs.			
I don't have much access to a car.			
The facilities are too far away.			
It costs too much to travel to them.			
I don't go out; I prefer to stay home.			
The facilities aren't open when I want to use them.			
Lack of public transportation to get there.			
The facilities are not lighted for night use.			
The facilities are too crowded.			
It is too dangerous there.			
I'm too busy; I don't have time to go.			
Poor maintenance of the facilities.			
I never think of going to them.			
Lack of staff to enforce security.			
The facilities are poor quality.			
The staff is not friendly.			
My friends don't go.			
I'm just not interested in what there is to do there.			
Too few restrooms at the facilities.			
I feel uncomfortable there.			
It costs too much to get in.			
Rowdy, undesirable people go there.			
Lack of staff to lead programs.			

What is your zip code? \_\_\_\_\_

What is your ethnic background?

Black \_\_\_\_\_ Latin \_\_\_\_\_ Non-Latin White \_\_\_\_\_ Other \_\_\_\_\_ (list)

What is your age? \_\_\_\_\_ years.

Was the combined income of all members of your household more than \$20,000 last year?

(If "yes" ask...)	(If "no" ask...)
Yes	No
Was it more than \$30,000?	Was it more than \$12,000?
Yes      No	Yes      No
(circle one)	(circle one)

(\_\_\_\_\_ Is the person talking male \_\_\_\_\_ or female \_\_\_\_\_?)

Thank you for your time!

**Introductory Section to Samples 3 through 6**  
**Austin, Texas Parks and Recreation**  
**Department Citizen Survey**

Census Block \_\_\_\_\_

Day Month

Use 24-hour time

First, I would like to know which of the following facilities and programs *you* (not other members of your family) have used in the past 12 months. (When you come to a facility the respondent uses, stop and ask how often, giving the alternatives shown along the top. If the facility used is a park facility, mark with a "1"; if it is operated by other public agencies, private clubs, the Y, school district or businesses, mark with a "2.")

	Not at All	Less Than Once a Month	About Once a Month	About Once a Week	Almost Daily
_____ (A) Parks, playground or greenbelts (city facilities OR McKinney Falls, LCRA Parks, county parks, private parks)	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____ (B) Tennis (city facilities OR U. T. apartment complexes, private clubs)	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____ (C) Swimming (city, neighborhood or municipal pools OR Y's swim clubs, apartments)	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____ (D) Golf (city courses; Hancock, Jimmy Clay, Lions and Morris Williams OR Lost Creek, Onion Creek, miniature golf)	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____ (E) Recreation centers	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____ (F) Organized athletics (city leagues OR intramurals, youth leagues, church leagues, bowling leagues)	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____ (G) Outdoor nature programs (Natural Science Center, Pioneer Farm, Mayfield Park OR Wild Basin, U. T. Outdoor Nature Tubing and canoe trips)	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____ (H) Senior citizen programs (city OR churches, Experience Unlimited)	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____ (I) Arts facilities or programs (Elizabeth New and O'Henry Museums, Zilker Plays and Concerts OR LBJ Library, Humanities Research Center, Art Galleries)	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____ (J) Community education programs	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____ (K) Programs offered for handicapped persons	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____ (L) Keep fit programs or facilities (City hike and bike trails or city streets OR weight lifting, Nautilus)	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____



**Neighborhood Capital and Operating Priorities**

(personal interview)

Interviewer \_\_\_\_\_

Recently the Austin Parks and Recreation Department sponsored a series of public meetings in this neighborhood. From these meetings information was gained regarding priorities which the Parks and Recreation Department should undertake. The amount of money available for some of these preferences is very limited, so the Parks and Recreation Department wants to know which items in this part of the city you feel should be given highest priority.

Here is a list of parks and recreation facilities in this neighborhood.

- (a) Please list in order of priority the four parks and facilities you use the most.
- (b) Please rank in order of importance the four parks or facilities you would like to see given priority in expenditures on improvements.

	<u>Use Most</u>	<u>Priority for Improvement</u>
_____ Franklin Park		
_____ Houston Park		
_____ Jimmy Clay Golf Course		
_____ Mabel Davis District Park		
_____ Odom Park		
_____ Onion Creek Greenbelt		
_____ South Boggy Creek Greenbelt		
_____ Town Lake		
_____ Williamson Creek Greenbelt		
_____ Williams School		

Please list in order of preference three new park and recreation facilities, programs, or services you would like to see in this part of the city.

First preference \_\_\_\_\_

Second preference \_\_\_\_\_

Third preference \_\_\_\_\_

Please list any existing programs or services presently offered by the Parks and Recreation Department you would like to see improved.

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Could you please tell us the level of priority which should be given by the city in spending the limited funds it has available for the following projects:

	<u>Very Low Priority</u>	<u>Fairly Low Priority</u>	<u>Fairly High Priority</u>	<u>Very High Priority</u>
_____ More facilities and programs for younger children, ages 1-5.	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____ Create more recreational opportunity for senior citizens.	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____ Provide more facilities and programs for children ages 6-12.	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____ More programs and facilities for the 13-36 age group.	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____ Improve access to Lake Austin.	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____ Increase the number of shelters in parks.	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____ Increase the amount of supervision in parks.	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____ Increase efforts to control mosquitoes.	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____ Improve access to parks and buildings for the handicapped.	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____ Improve bus transportation to existing facilities.	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____ Extend swimming pool hours.	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____ Extend library hours and services.	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____ Increase security patrols in the parks.	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____ Upgrade the lighting in parks and trails.	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____ Extend the hike and bikeway system.	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____ Develop more neighborhood pocket parks in this area.	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____ Provide more neighborhood programs and classes in the arts.	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____ Provide more signs to locate and identify parks.	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____ Provide shade for children's play areas.	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____ Place more benches in the parks.	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____ Provide more picnic tables in the parks.	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____ Provide more restrooms in the parks.	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____ Build more ballfields.	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____ Develop a nature center.	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____ Build more tennis courts.	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____ Develop a skateboard facility in your neighborhood.	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____ Provide more summer neighborhood recreation programs.	_____	_____	_____	_____

	Very Low Priority	Fairly Low Priority	Fairly High Priority	Very High Priority
_____ Buy park land early for future use before houses are built.	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____ Plant more trees in parks.	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____ Monitor pollution levels in creeks and pools.	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____ Concerts should be held in parks other than Zilker.	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____ More soccer fields.	_____	_____	_____	_____

Now we would like you to indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements:

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
_____ The law requiring dogs to be on a leash in the parks should be more rigidly enforced.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____ Automobile traffic around the outside of parks should be reduced.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____ Activities which appeal to relatively small special interest groups rather than the majority of citizens should be supported by user fees.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____ If there were more opportunities for citizens who live in this neighborhood to have input into the planning, development and operation of recreation and parks facilities, I would participate.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____ Ballfields should be available for many sports rather than just one.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____ Children's play areas need more creative play equipment.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____ Greenbelts should <u>not</u> be extended throughout the city.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____ The Austin Parks and Recreation Dept. does not communicate with the public about its activities.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____ I would be willing to pay more local taxes to pay for improved recreation and park facilities.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____ I would be willing to pay more local taxes for more and better recreation programs.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____ Austin should have a zoological park.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____ Land developers should be required to provide land to the city for public parks in new subdivisions.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____ Undeveloped park land should be open for public access and use prior to its development by the city.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____



	<u>Strongly Disagree</u>	<u>Disagree</u>	<u>Neither Agree Nor Disagree</u>	<u>Agree</u>	<u>Strongly Agree</u>
_____ Picnic tables and portable toilets should be placed on undeveloped park sites prior to development to permit limited public use.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____ Neighborhood groups should be encouraged to provide maintenance in undeveloped parks.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____ Parks and recreation facilities should be distributed throughout the neighborhood and not be located only at school sites.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____ More use should be made of schools for summer recreation programs.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____ Sections of Mabel Davis District Park should remain in a natural state.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____ Improve cooperation between Linder School and Mabel Davis District Park.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

Do you think, if the money were available, the City of Austin should: (circle only one statement for each set.)

- |   |           |  |           |              |
|---|-----------|--|-----------|--------------|
| _____ 1. Spend available dollars to build several small parks in this neighborhood. | <b>Or</b> | 2. Spend available dollars to build one big park in this neighborhood.   | <b>Or</b> | 3. Undecided |
| _____ 1. Provide wooden picnic tables which can be moved in the parks.              | <b>Or</b> | 2. Provide concrete picnic tables which are fixed in place in the parks. | <b>Or</b> | 3. Undecided |
| _____ 1. Provide a large number of average programs.                                | <b>Or</b> | 2. A smaller number of very high quality programs.                       | <b>Or</b> | 3. Undecided |

Do you think:

- |   |           |   |           |              |
|---|-----------|---|-----------|--------------|
| _____ 1. This neighborhood needs more facilities. | <b>Or</b> | 2. This neighborhood needs more programs. | <b>Or</b> | 3. Undecided |
|---|-----------|---|-----------|--------------|

Random Number \_\_\_\_\_  
 Census Tract \_\_\_\_\_  
 Census Block \_\_\_\_\_

*Sample 4*  
**Delivery Service Instrument**  
 (personal interview)

In the following questions, please indicate where you think the Parks and Recreation Department should place greatest emphasis. (Circle only one statement for each set.)

- |   |   |                         |
|---|---|-------------------------|
| _____ 1. Join with school districts to develop recreational facilities for use by both school children and the general community. | <b>Or</b> 2. Develop separate recreational facilities for the sole use of the community.                                    | <b>Or</b> 3. Undecided. |
| _____ 1. Expand inner city open space by converting certain streets and alleys into outdoor pedestrian malls.                     | <b>Or</b> 2. Concentrate on acquiring only vacant land for open space purposes.   | <b>Or</b> 3. Undecided. |
| _____ 1. Provide more recreational instruction classes.   | <b>Or</b> 2. Leave recreation classes to other groups (community education, clubs, or private businesses).                  | <b>Or</b> 3. Undecided. |
| _____ 1. Develop only permanent facilities.   | <b>Or</b> 2. Provide some mobile recreation units that can travel to different parts of the city.                           | <b>Or</b> 3. Undecided. |
| _____ 1. Contract with private groups to operate programs if the costs can be reduced.  | <b>Or</b> 2. Provide programs directly to ensure quality control.   | <b>Or</b> 3. Undecided. |
| _____ 1. Spend more of its budget to buy additional park land.  | <b>Or</b> 2. Spend more of its budget to build additional recreation facilities.  | <b>Or</b> 3. Undecided. |
| _____ 1. Spend more of its budget on providing lands and facilities.  | <b>Or</b> 2. Spend more of its budget on providing programs and services.   | <b>Or</b> 3. Undecided. |
| _____ 1. Spend more of its budget for constructing new recreation and park facilities.  | <b>Or</b> 2. Spend more of its budget for upgrading existing recreation and park facilities.                                | <b>Or</b> 3. Undecided. |
| _____ 1. Place more emphasis on programs which assist low-income residents.   | <b>Or</b> 2. Place more emphasis on programs which provide greater opportunity for the average user.                        | <b>Or</b> 3. Undecided. |
| _____ 1. Place more emphasis on programs which assist the mentally and physically handicapped.                                    | <b>Or</b> 2. Place more emphasis on the average user.   | <b>Or</b> 3. Undecided. |
| _____ 1. Locate some parks near places where people normally congregate, such as shopping areas.                                  | <b>Or</b> 2. Keep parks separate from major pedestrian concentrations and locate them primarily in quiet residential areas. | <b>Or</b> 3. Undecided. |
| _____ 1. Place more emphasis on programs which assist senior citizens.  | <b>Or</b> 2. Place more emphasis on the average user.   | <b>Or</b> 3. Undecided. |
| _____ 1. Lease space for recreation purposes whenever possible.   | <b>Or</b> 2. Build new recreation facilities.   | <b>Or</b> 3. Undecided. |

**The Austin Parks and Recreation Department:**

	<u>Strongly Agree</u>	<u>Agree</u>	<u>Undecided</u>	<u>Disagree</u>	<u>Strongly Disagree</u>
_____ Does a good job of advertising the facilities, programs and courses it offers.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____ Should jointly finance and operate facilities and programs with private businesses.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____ Has a responsibility to publicize recreational opportunities in Austin provided by other nonprofit groups and businesses.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____ Should offer child day-care services at selected recreation centers.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

Now, we would like you to divide 10 imaginary tax dollars among the four items listed below so that this division will reflect the way you feel the parks and recreation department should spend available tax dollars.

_____	Renovation of existing facilities.	_____	dollars
_____	Development of new programs.	_____	dollars
_____	Construction of new facilities.	_____	dollars
_____	Purchase of more park and open space land.	_____	dollars

Who should provide the following types of recreation opportunities in Austin? Check no more than two for each item.

	City of Austin PARD	Nonprofit groups (YMCA, church groups, schools, and universities)	Private Businesses
_____ boat rentals			
_____ swimming pools			
_____ tennis courts			
_____ performing arts: dance, drama and music instruction			
_____ game rooms/amusements			
_____ art exhibits			
_____ golf instruction			
_____ racquetball and handball courts			
_____ arts and crafts instruction			

## Part II

- How well do you feel the Austin Park and Recreation Dept. maintains the city parks?  
 (a) excellent \_\_\_\_\_ (b) good \_\_\_\_\_ (c) average \_\_\_\_\_  
 (d) poor \_\_\_\_\_ (e) very poor \_\_\_\_\_
- Name the two parks in Austin that you think are the best cared for.  
 (a) \_\_\_\_\_ (b) \_\_\_\_\_
- Do you have a dog?    yes \_\_\_\_\_ no \_\_\_\_\_



At this point show person being interviewed the set of photographs depicting typical ways of maintaining parks (figures 1 through 6).

\_\_\_\_\_ 4. Most city parks are maintained in different ways. The photographs represent these different ways. Which photograph best describes the maintenance in the park you visit most?

- (a) figure 1 \_\_\_\_\_ (b) figure 2 \_\_\_\_\_ (c) figure 3 \_\_\_\_\_  
(d) figure 4 \_\_\_\_\_ (e) figure 5 \_\_\_\_\_ (f) figure 6 \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ 5. What particular aspect of maintenance in the photograph influenced your decision?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ 6. Number the photographs to illustrate best the way you want the park you visit most to be cared for. (1 being the most and 6 being the least desired)

- (a) figure 1 \_\_\_\_\_ (b) figure 2 \_\_\_\_\_ (c) figure 3 \_\_\_\_\_  
(d) figure 4 \_\_\_\_\_ (e) figure 5 \_\_\_\_\_ (f) figure 6 \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ 7. To maintain a typical 20-acre park in the way shown in the photograph would require the following average cost per acre/per year:

- (a) figures 1 and 2: \$1,200/acre/per year  
(b) figures 3 and 4: \$600/acre/per year  
(c) figures 5 and 6: \$200/acre/per year

\_\_\_\_\_ Given the above cost necessary to maintain a park in each of the ways shown, number the type of maintenance you would most support.

- (a) figures 1 and 2 \_\_\_\_\_ (b) figures 3 and 4 \_\_\_\_\_  
(c) figures 5 and 6 \_\_\_\_\_

At this point show the person being interviewed the set of photographs depicting typical ways of maintaining creeks and greenbelt areas (figures 7, 8 and 9).

\_\_\_\_\_ 8. The photographs represent the ways creeks and greenbelt areas are maintained by the city. Number the photographs to illustrate best the way you would like most to see creeks and greenbelt areas maintained. (1 being the most and 3 being the least desired)

- (a) figure 7 \_\_\_\_\_ (b) figure 8 \_\_\_\_\_ (c) figure 9 \_\_\_\_\_ (d) all \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ 9. What aspect of maintenance in the photograph influenced your decision?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ 10. To maintain creeks and greenbelt areas as shown in the photographs would require the following average cost per mile:

- (a) figure 7: \$1,600 annually (b) figure 8: \$800 annually  
(c) figure 9: \$250 annually

\_\_\_\_\_ Given the above costs necessary to maintain creeks and greenbelt areas in each of the ways shown, number the types of maintenance you would most support.

- (a) figure 7 \_\_\_\_\_ (b) figure 8 \_\_\_\_\_ (c) figure 9 \_\_\_\_\_ (d) all \_\_\_\_\_

# Sample 5

## Park Maintenance (personal interview)

The questions in this portion of the survey will help the Parks and Recreation Dept. to upgrade its current maintenance practices to better meet the needs of the citizens.

### Part 1

Please express your opinion from strongly agree (SA), moderately agree (MA), neutral (N), moderately disagree (MD) to strongly disagree (SD) about the following statements concerning typical Austin Parks and Recreation facilities.

	<u>SA</u>	<u>MA</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>MD</u>	<u>SD</u>
1. Parks should have luscious green grass.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
2. Grass and lawn areas are mowed too frequently.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
3. Beautification projects are adequate.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
4. Grass should be edged and kept from growing on to streets and sidewalks.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
5. Plants and shrubs are pruned too much.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
6. There are enough natural areas in the parks.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
7. I would like to help beautify a park or creek in my neighborhood.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
8. Weed killers should be used in parks and green-belts.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
9. There are too many dead and broken branches in the parks.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
10. The number and location of trash and garbage containers in the parks are satisfactory.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
11. Pets cause sanitary problems in parks.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
12. Drinking fountains work.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
13. Restroom facilities are clean and sanitary.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
14. Pets should be allowed in parks.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
15. Trash and garbage containers are emptied frequently.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
16. Tennis courts, basketball courts and multi-use courts are maintained the way I like them to be.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
17. Broken, defaced or missing signs in parks are left too long before being repaired or replaced.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
18. Hiking, jogging and bike paths are well maintained.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
19. The Parks and Recreation Department repairs or replaces damaged facilities promptly.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
20. Lights on tennis courts, ball fields or sidewalks are replaced promptly when burned, cut or broken.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

SAMANMDSD

- \_\_\_\_\_ 21. Playgrounds are safe from hazards such as missing bolts, broken steps or broken glass. \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_ 22. Athletic fields are prepared the way I want them to be. \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_ 23. Equipment, such as basketball goals and backboards, back stops on ball fields, nets on tennis courts, seats and chains on swings, or courts and fields are adequate for participation in the activity. \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_ 24. Buildings and constructed facilities are painted as frequently as they should be. \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_ 25. Paved parking areas (in parks) are striped adequately to indicate desired parking arrangements. \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_ 26. Chuckholes in park roads and parking areas are always repaired to smooth conditions. \_\_\_\_\_

What maintenance conditions would definitely keep you from visiting a park? (List number of statement above. Show list to respondent, if necessary.)

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. None of the above \_\_\_\_\_

### Sample 6

#### Motivation

(personal interview)

Suppose you were helping prepare the Austin Park and Recreation Department's budget. Based on what you know about their services, would you budget more, less or about the same city money for each service?

	<u>Spend More</u>	<u>Spend Less</u>	<u>Spend Same</u>	<u>No Opinion</u>
_____ Parks or greenbelts	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____ Playgrounds	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____ Tennis	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____ Swimming	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____ Golf	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____ Recreation centers	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____ Organized athletics	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____ Outdoor nature programs	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____ Senior citizen programs	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____ Arts facilities or programs	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____ Community education programs	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____ Programs offered for handicapped persons	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____ Keep fit programs or facilities	_____	_____	_____	_____



How often would you use recreation and park facilities or services in the City of Austin if gasoline were:

		More Frequently	About the Same	Less Frequently
_____	\$1.50 per gallon	_____	_____	_____
_____	\$2.00 per gallon	_____	_____	_____
_____	\$2.50 per gallon	_____	_____	_____
_____	not readily available on weekends	_____	_____	_____
_____	rationed to 40 gallons per month per vehicle	_____	_____	_____

When you make a decision to participate in any type of leisure activity, how important is it:

	Very Important	Moderately Important	Slightly Important	Not At All important
_____	To be in a natural setting.	_____	_____	_____
_____	For a chance to create (mentally or otherwise) something new or different.	_____	_____	_____
_____	That I can be with my friends.	_____	_____	_____
_____	That the family can spend some time together.	_____	_____	_____
_____	To develop my skills and ability.	_____	_____	_____
_____	To develop my knowledge of things.	_____	_____	_____
_____	To feel my independence.	_____	_____	_____
_____	To be with others who enjoy the same things I do.	_____	_____	_____
_____	To learn more about nature.	_____	_____	_____
_____	For the opportunity to think new thoughts.	_____	_____	_____
_____	To share my skill and knowledge with others.	_____	_____	_____
_____	To enjoy competing against others.	_____	_____	_____
_____	To be away from the family temporarily.	_____	_____	_____
_____	To help keep me in shape.	_____	_____	_____
_____	For others to see me do things I am good at.	_____	_____	_____
_____	To enjoy the sense of rugged self-sufficiency in a natural environment.	_____	_____	_____
_____	To find out about things.	_____	_____	_____
_____	To enjoy the quietness and serenity.	_____	_____	_____
_____	To add some variety to my daily routine.	_____	_____	_____
_____	To take it easy physically.	_____	_____	_____
_____	To give my mind a rest.	_____	_____	_____
_____	To improve my physical health.	_____	_____	_____
_____	To get away from the responsibilities of my everyday life.	_____	_____	_____
_____	Just to be doing something active.	_____	_____	_____
_____	The surroundings are soothing.	_____	_____	_____
_____	To get physical exercise.	_____	_____	_____
_____	To build or create something.	_____	_____	_____
_____	To have a chance to meet new friends.	_____	_____	_____
_____	To help get rid of some up-tight feelings.	_____	_____	_____
_____	To have a sense of adventure and challenge.	_____	_____	_____
_____	To get a feeling of danger and risk.	_____	_____	_____

**Appendix C**  
**Sample Cover Letter and Follow-up Letter**  
**Sample Cover Letter**

Dear Citizen:

You have been chosen as one of a select sample of area residents.

This questionnaire is part of a study being conducted by the Department of Recreation and Parks. The goal of the study is to learn more about the recreational interests of residents in the \_\_\_\_\_ area.

If this study is to be successful, it is important that you answer each question thoughtfully and frankly. This is not a test. There are no right or wrong answers.

All individual responses are completely **confidential**. To ensure confidentiality, please do not write your name on the questionnaire.

We need your help. Please take the next few minutes to complete the questionnaire and return it in the prepaid envelope.

Thank you for your support.

Sincerely,

**Sample Follow-up Letter**

Dear Visitor:

About 2 weeks ago we sent you a questionnaire about your visit to \_\_\_\_\_ Recreation Area. Your responses are very important to us, so we are providing you with another copy of the questionnaire in case the original has been lost or misplaced.

The information provided through questionnaire response will be used by the Park and Recreation Department in better serving users of \_\_\_\_\_. This is your opportunity to play a role in the management of this recreation area. Returned questionnaires will be handled in strictest confidence.

If you have not already done so, please complete the questionnaire and return it in the enclosed postage-paid envelope as soon as possible. Or call us at \_\_\_\_\_ and we'll pick up the completed questionnaire.

Thank you for your interest and cooperation.

Sincerely,

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